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# Editor's Note, The Iowa Review, v. 43 no. 3, Winter 2013/2014

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LYNNE NUGENT

## EDITOR'S NOTE

In Jennifer Bowen Hicks's short story "Old News, Unverified," which opens this issue, the young narrator, Ruthie, and her mother argue over whether a previous tenant really burned herself up in their backyard shed. "That shed is just a shed.... There was no fire," her mother tells her. Still, Ruthie persists in furnishing and peopling her imaginary landscape, as children (and writers) are wont to do. Like Ruthie with her reporter's notebook in hand, trying to interview a ghost, the writers whose stories, poems, essays, and reviews fill this issue interrogate imaginary spaces that intersect with our own: psychological worlds; worlds constructed of language; fictional worlds filled with the untrue or the impossible; the past.

Hicks's story was an unsolicited submission, plucked from the hundreds that arrive each fall by our genre editors with the help of many volunteer readers. Most of the other pieces in the issue came to be published by a similar route, but three were chosen by outside judges in our 2013 Iowa Review Awards contest. Laura Lynn Brown's essay "Fifty Things about My Mother" delineates her grief in fifty verbal snapshots, one for each year of her mother's life. Meredith Stricker's poem sequence "Hazardous Materials" juxtaposes quotations from the likes of Walter Benjamin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge with images from an ecologically fragile world. Elise Winn's story "Honey Moon" conjures a parallel reality in which terminal illness is manifested in a growing transparency. Congratulations to these writers and to the runners-up in the contest, Rebecca Lilly, Ronit Feinglass Plank, and Meghan Flaherty, whose work we are equally thrilled to present in this issue.

Another contest brought us our cover and insert images. Colin Edgington's series [*Umbrae*] won over the judges of our 2013 photography award with its subtle lyricism. "His work whispers, makes you move in closer in hopes of hearing a secret," wrote judge Alec Soth. Stay tuned for our next issue to see the work of the runner-up in the photography contest, Maury Gortemiller.

Genre editors, volunteer readers, outside judges (not to mention our indefatigable interim managing editor, print designer, webmaster, and interns, who make each issue happen): as always, *The Iowa Review* is a collaborative effort. And this issue has been even more collaborative than most, since it is transitional between editors in chief. Some of the work was accepted

by our former editor, Russell Scott Valentino, who has moved on from the University of Iowa to a new academic position at Indiana University; some of it was accepted by me during the interim period; and some was accepted by our new editor, Harilaos Stecopoulos. We thank Russell for all his hard work and send him best wishes, he of the dapper fedoras and car coats and frequent international travel (leading at least one intern to regard him as a mythical figure on par with James Bond), and we extend Harry a warm welcome as he embarks on this new adventure with the trademark great enthusiasm he brings to all his endeavors.

Despite the number of people involved in the issue, this one seems, as each one does to me, one organic thing. How this happens is as mysterious as the alchemy that produces a child (and, by the way, there are a lot of children in this issue). The narrator of one of Brandi George's poems, haunted by a mother's religiosity, could have coffee with the narrator of one of Jerimee Bloemeke's poems, haunted by a father's crudeness. Shannon Robinson's "Birdie," about a woman becoming landlord to a bird, could inhabit a surreal avian anthology with Marc Berley's "What Kind of Bird Are You?," about a boy whose mother has become a bird. Bruce Snider learning to defend himself with a gun resonates both with Melina Kamberić's protagonist trying to evade a sniper and with Elizabeth Merritt Abbott finding her weapon useless against her real enemy in Afghanistan. There are many other correspondences I could mention, but I'll leave them for the reader to discover.

To return to "Old News, Unverified," both Ruthie and her mother come to realize that, whatever the facts, the imagination does have a reality of its own, that intangibles like longing and betrayal can kindle conflagrations just as easily as any match. "This awful love" is how Ruthie describes what is revealed to her in the course of her investigative reporting. The other writers in this issue arrive in very different ways at the same conclusion. Old news, continuously made new.